

MARKETING COMPETENCIES OF THE TRADE PERSONNEL

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Abstract

Literature approaching the field of marketing deals with issues specific to the human resources competencies especially in the chapters regarding the organization of the marketing activity. The number of studies and the articles published in this area so far is, however, a rather low one. This article attempts to produce, from the perspective of an exploratory approach and without having as goal to develop or validate a list containing various items, the answers to a series of questions such as: what is meant by marketing skills and what they are, what are the main marketing skills that should be found at the level of the staff working in the field of trade and which should be the qualities of trade personnel conducting marketing activities.

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Introduction

Planning, organizing and conducting effective marketing activities of organizations in all areas of activity involves, among the other significant matters, considering the specific issues of identifying and defining the competencies which should be reflected at each of the staff members involved in specific activities. Literature considers that the personnel working within the department of marketing or conducting overall marketing activities must hold thorough specialized knowledge

backed by numerous qualities reflected in the professional map of the marketing specialist (Balaure and others, 2002).

A particular problem for the effective functioning of the marketing activity of the organizations is represented by the relationships between the specialists in marketing and sales employees of the organization. However, they express generally, a genuine disagreement between two significantly different cultures (Kotler, 1997). The success of the marketing activities carried out by organizations depends on the ability of these two groups to cooperate in order to achieve performance targets, both marketing and sales related. Each of these two categories of professionals brings specific skills and competencies: specialists in marketing base their efforts on the results of their marketing research, trying to identify and know at a high level the market segments, focus on the planning and think on a long-term perspective and seeking to obtain profits and achieve a higher market share. Sales specialists base their activities rather on experiences, trying to understand the problems of each buyer, are oriented towards selling and think mostly on a short-term perspective seeking especially to maximize sales (Kotler, 1997).

Specialists and personnel working in the field of marketing in the retailing and wholesaling organizations, respectively, face the need to make decisions related mainly to the (Kotler and others, 1998):

- market and organization's positioning within, the range of products and / or services provided to the consumers, the prices and / or tariffs used in the market, promotion tools employed to communicate with consumers, location of the retail units, in the case of retailing organizations; and
- market and organization's positioning within and the content of the marketing mix used (especially in terms of prices and promotions implemented), in the case of the wholesaling organizations.

In this context created by the environment in which marketing generally works within the organizations, by the specific characteristics required by the marketing integration and employment together with the retail or wholesale trading activities and by the increase in terms of importance as well as the role in expansion of marketing within the organization, it becomes necessary to identify and define the marketing competencies that have to exist and be employed by the organization.

1. What are marketing competencies?

To exert its various functions (commercial, financial, production), the organization must have the necessary competencies (Dubois and Jolibert, 1994). Similarly, to exert its specific marketing functions, the organization must have a set of dedicated competencies. The definition of the marketing competencies may start from different definitions given to the competencies of an organization. One of the reference definitions in this respect considers generally the basic competencies of an organization as being a set of skills, knowledge and technologies enabling it to provide specific benefits to the customers and generate competitive advantages for this (Lynch, 2002). Remaining at the level of the organization, Hamel and Prahalad identify (1994) its basic major competencies: the creation of value for the customer, differentiation against competitors and the expandable and adaptable products, services, brands and activities.

Coming closer to the specific of the marketing activities, the content of the marketing competencies can be defined based on the attempts made by various authors and researchers in this regard. Thus, Golfetto and Gibbert (2006) have arrived to the conclusion that marketing competencies represent rather a generic label used to express specific competencies of marketing such as those associated with the customer relations or channel management.

The set including 20 distinctive marketing competencies developed by Conant and others (1990) has been one of the first, and in the same time, the most relevant points of view regarding this subject. Its content refers to the:

- knowledge of customers,
- knowledge of competitors,
- knowledge of industry trends,
- accuracy of profitability and revenue forecasting,
- awareness of organizational marketing strengths,
- awareness of organizational marketing weaknesses,
- marketing planning process,
- allocation of marketing department resources,
- integration of marketing activities,
- skill to segment and target markets,
- ability to differentiate service offerings,
- new service development process,
- quality of service and offerings,
- effectiveness of pricing program(s),
- advertising effectiveness,

- effectiveness of public relations,
- image,
- locations of facilities,
- effectiveness of cost containment, and
- control and evaluation of marketing activities

Thus, an interesting view on the marketing competencies that must be present both at the level of the marketing managers with relevant experience in the market and the employees starting their careers in this field, is proposed by Walker and Wagstaff (2008) through their research conducted by the Department of Marketing of the Monash University (Australia). Thus, the marketing staff should have the necessary powers to:

- analyze the behavior of stakeholders,
- segment markets,
- identify and analyze organizational marketing problems,
- develop measurable/appropriate research questions and methods,
- design & evaluate questionnaires and surveys,
- evaluate and analyze market research data,
- use a range of modeling techniques to analyze marketing information,
- construct a marketing communication strategy,
- construct measurable objectives for marketing communication,
- identify the marketing channel members linked to the organization,
- monitor/measure/evaluate customer satisfaction,
- analyze the organization's marketing environment,
- identify opportunities, threats and sales issues,
- construct a strategic marketing plan,
- evaluate the performance of an implemented marketing plan /strategy,
- analyze the organizational environment to identify sales issues and opportunities,
- manage marketing programs and
- manage marketing's role within the organization.

Approaching the marketing competencies in a study conducted at the level of the Australian market, from the perspective of the specific activities conducted by the retail organizations, Young and others propose (2005) a set of competencies, very close to that proposed by Conant and others, that these must have and use in order to differentiate in the relationship to the competitors present in the market and to

achieve better comparative performances:

- knowledge of current customers,
- knowledge of competitors,
- knowledge of prospective customers,
- knowledge of industry needs,
- segmenting and targeting markets,
- accuracy of forecasting,
- differentiation of store,
- customer service,
- effective pricing,
- store layout and merchandising,
- atmosphere,
- store image,
- putting plans into action,
- aware of strengths,
- employee training,
- store location and
- control of retail programs

Considering the different views expressed in literature and, in the same time, the experience of the organizations in conducting marketing activities, may lead to the identification of a set of areas where the marketing competencies operate both at the global level of the organization and at the levels specific to its departments including the trading ones. Also, this set can be extended, in terms of its applicability, to the different fields of activity and industries present in a certain market. These are:

• ***products and services provided by the organization***: the specific related competencies refer to the definition of the size and structure of the products and/or services range (through the assessment of the opportunities for diversification or assortment selection), ensuring the appropriate degree of innovation of products (through the introduction of the new products and/or services, and improvement of the existing ones) and maintaining the adequate level of quality for the product and/or services provided.

• ***prices and tariffs employed by the organization***: the major competencies aim to provide a specific contribution to the adoption of a pricing strategy and to the implementation of specific policies in order to reach its marketing, commercial or sales objectives;

- ***distribution of the organization's goods and services***: the specific competencies refer to the contributions that marketing specialists can add to the design, creation and implementation of the distribution channels used in terms of the assessment of the opportunities to be seized regarding the employment of certain types of intermediaries, to establish the optimal dimensions of the distribution channels to be used and by assessing the degree of control and the level of involvement of the organization within the channels used;

- ***promotion of the organization's products and services***: the specific competencies have as object the definition of the communication goals and target audiences, selection of the media and of the communication tools that will be used, creation of the message that will be conveyed to the identified target audiences, development and administration of the marketing communication budget, coordinating, monitoring and assessment of the marketing communication activities and campaigns;

- ***personnel of the organization***: without aiming to substitute the specialized structure in human resources and activities carried out by this, the specific competencies may have as goals the contribution of the marketing personnel to the formation of all employees of the organization in terms of the adoption and implementation of a customer-oriented attitude resulted in an appropriate behavior both at the level of staff interacting directly with customers and of the staff providing support and conducting back-office activities;

- ***processes of the organization***: personnel working within the trading organizations must have the talents and skills to facilitate, on the one hand, the increase in effectiveness of the conducted activities and, on the other hand, the meeting of the consumers needs and fulfillment to a higher extent of their expectations;

- ***physical evidence of the organization***: given that, especially in retailing, creating a pleasant environment, providing the basis for the completion of a higher volume of sales, is a determining factor in achieving consistent performances in marketing and sales, the operating personnel within the trading organizations must have the necessary competencies to value the context in which are provided the products and services of the organization and to give the consumer as many opportunities as possible to experience more favorably the organization as a whole including its range of products and services, as well as the brands or marketing events in which it is involved.

Implementing all these competencies can be successfully done only if the trading organization operates having as a support philosophy including as a core element the orientation toward its clients. Starting from the assumption that customer

orientation means to identify and analyze continuously and in a comprehensive manner the customer expectations, their influence on products and services design, and in the way of interacting with customers, aiming to develop and maintain long-term and economically advantageous relationships to customers (Bruhn, 2001), the exertion of the marketing competencies should be based on the planning, organization and conduct on a permanent basis marketing research activities. Thus, the personnel of the trading organizations can and should participate in all the phases of the marketing research as these were defined by Catoiu and others (2002). Areas that can be targeted through marketing research conducted by the trading organizations are the organization itself, its market, the specific marketing environment, the consumption needs, consumer buying behavior and the consumption, marketing-mix policy, analyzes and forecasts used to set marketing programs and activities or to assess performances in the field (Balaure and others, 2002).

Marketing competencies of the personnel within the trading organizations must be employed targeting the global objective of creating long-term development and maintenance, mutually beneficial and profitable relationships with their customers. All the relationships with customers (but also with employees, suppliers, and the distributors) represent one of the most valuable assets of an organization: relational capital of the organization – assembly of the knowledge, experiences and confidence the organization enjoys in its relation with the customers, employees, suppliers and distribution partners, is often worth more than its tangible assets (Kotler, 2003). The concrete purpose of these relationships aims to increase the loyalty of its clients: this is achieved by satisfying the customers expectations using an offer oriented toward them and through their content for the performance of the organization (Bruhn, 2001). Here's why, the personnel of the trading organizations has to be formed and motivated to work in order to pursue both achievement of immediate results (the conclusion of a sale) and the prospects offered by a long-term relationship built with the customer.

Last but not least, the personnel of the trading organizations must employ modern management methods that are adapted to the processes of marketing, the most representative in this respect are the management by objectives, management by project, management by budgets and management by products (Olteanu, 2002).

2. Professional Map of the Marketing Specialist

Professional map of the marketing specialist (figure 1) is a way of building and graphically presenting other qualities and skills that a marketing specialist should

have, as well as, to a significant extent, the personnel from the other areas of the organization including that working within the specialized trading structures of the organization, that comes to conduct permanently, periodically or occasionally. Starting from the idea that success of the marketing activity depends significantly on the quality of human resources involved within, it can be said that the recruitment, selection and motivation of the specialists in the field are implicit requirements of the marketing success.

Criteria		Assessment				
		1	2	3	4	5
Intellectual skills	Observation skills					O
	Analytical skills					O
	Synthetic skills				O	
	Abstract thinking		O			
	Concrete thinking				O	
	Perspective					O
	Intuition			O		
	Common sense				O	
	Taste					O
	Creative imagination					O
Memory	Visual				O	
	Sound			O		
Efficiency skills	Method				O	
	Focus			O		
	Tenacity, commitment				O	
	Patience			O		
	Precision		O			
	Mobility				O	
	Initiative					O
	Self-confidence				O	
	Prudence		O			
	Cooperation					O

Figure 1 Professional map of the marketing specialist

Note: in this model, the significance of the five steps of the scale is: „5 – exceptional”, „4 – very good”, „3 – good”, 2 – satisfactory” and „1 – not satisfactory”.

An illustration of the qualities needed by a marketing specialist is shown in the model below and it is proposed by Florescu and others (2003). The model represents an attempt to build the profile of a marketing specialist in terms of the intellectual, mnemonic and personal skills effectiveness. According to this model, a good specialist in marketing must distinguish himself by a great spirit of observation and analysis, vision, taste and amazing imagination. Initiative and the spirit of cooperation complement the high-level profile of the marketing specialist.

Of course, this model can be improved leading to its adaptation, on the one hand, to the specific market where organization operates and, on the other hand, to the employer's expectations in terms of the qualities of the marketing specialist to be integrated within the organization.

The research approach employed by the Monash University proposes a set of skills of the marketing personnel including basic mathematics and statistics, usage of the computer software, written and oral communication skills, interpersonal and team working skills, problem solving skills, comprehension of the business processes and personal skills (entrepreneurial, leadership, self-development, work experience, political skills, career involvement, independence, commitment, personal presentation, balance in work and home life, ability to deal with pressure, motivation, stress management, time management and change management).

In building the profile of the marketing specialist, a determining contribution is added by the "industry standards", the characteristics and features required by the specificity of the activities conducted in the reference market. The practice, experience and, to some extent, the tradition of existing organizations in the market impose not only concepts, methods, techniques and tools used in the market but also a certain way to carry out effectively marketing activities, a specific "know-how". This specific way also demands the existence of professionals and specialists with a certain profile and with certain qualities and skills that need to be as close as possible to these standards. Of course, in recruitment and selection of the specialists it is considered the possibility, sometimes even the necessity, to train and adapt them to the industry (market) where the organization operates.

A significant influence on the establishing of criteria used for the recruitment, selection and assessment of the marketing specialists competencies is exerted by firms specialized in recruitment and selection of the human resources. In building the profile of the marketing specialist, the organization may also call on the methods and conclusions of the firms selecting and recruiting human resources, their contributions being more valuable as they achieve greater experience in this activity and become more specialized at the level of this occupational category of marketing specialists. To the completion of the marketing specialist profile contribute to some extent the professional associations and institutions of

accreditation and certification in the field that usually establish standards, applicable to national and international levels for the entry into the profession and its practicing. These standards cover not only the simple knowledge of the concepts, methods, techniques and tools of marketing but also the existence of qualities and skills allowing their implementation.

The current level of development of marketing, the complexity of the markets where most organizations operate, and the more diversified needs and increasingly high expectations of consumers often make impossible in practice the finding of a marketing specialist able to identify all the suitable solutions for an organization. Since the marketing decisions are more and more based on various skills, such as those from its own, but also from the other outside, domains – financial, commercial, technical, etc., and because the context of conducting marketing activities exposes the organization to the influences of variables over which its control is very low or even nonexistent, networking has become one of the qualities most desired and expected from the marketing specialists or professionals.

Marketing involves, on a more extensive scale, the conducting of team-work, including specialists in marketing having distinctive competencies in the various domains and sub-domains of the field but also specialists, from other areas of the organization or from outside it. Also in this area, outsourcing solutions become options more accepted and implemented by the organizations; the main areas in which these solutions have been used being the marketing research and communication marketing organization.

Conclusions

Defining the marketing competencies, their field of implementation in general, and in particular in the area of trade, continues to be an open topic in the scientific literature. If one is to consider the operational elements of the marketing activities and the need to have customer orientation as support, an area of marketing competencies can be built in terms of the marketing-mix structure of the organization, there remain in discussion at least the following points:

- Are marketing competencies common for both retail and wholesale trading organizations? Can there be built distinct sets of competencies, varying significantly for these two types of organizations? Might this differentiation also consider the type of products marketed or the types of clients of the organization?
- Where and to what extent should the existing marketing competencies be localized within the trading organizations: only at the level of staff coming in direct contact with customers of the organization or at the level of the other categories of

personnel?

- Can the professional map of the marketing specialist be applied at the level of the trading organizations? It is necessary to differentiate between the wholesale and retail trading organizations. The differentiation made based on the type of products marketed or the types of clients of the organization may be also considered.

- What are the talents and skills that the personnel of the trading organizations must have allowing to employ effectively their competencies? A set of significant talents and skills for the performances achieved by the organization can be identified.

- What are the relations between the existing staff specialized in marketing and the other staff within the trading organization and what are the boundaries to be considered between them in terms of their competence?

The answers to these questions can be obtained only after the completion of surveys at the level of representative samples among managers of the trading organizations and those who manage marketing activities carried out by them. The above questions are, in fact, the directions to be followed in a further research to address these issues.

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